

# The Interview

*By D. C. Denison*

The Washington Post \_\_\_\_\_  
The New York Times \_\_\_\_\_  
The Washington Times \_\_\_\_\_  
The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_  
The Christian Science Monitor \_\_\_\_\_  
New York Daily News \_\_\_\_\_  
USA Today \_\_\_\_\_  
The Chicago Tribune \_\_\_\_\_

*Best of Globe Magazine p. 8*  
Date *4 August 1991*



Stansfield Turner

**CONTINUED**

2.

*Stansfield Turner was the director of the CIA during the Carter administration. We spoke while he was in Boston to promote his new book, Terrorism and Democracy.*

**You've said that it's unrealistic to claim that we will not make deals with terrorists.**

It is unrealistic. Of the eight presidents I studied who dealt with hostage problems, seven made deals. And the reason they made deals is that the pressure of our

democracy is such that they are impelled to do something, and there often isn't much else they can do. It's hard for a democratic country to sit back and watch its citizens be maltreated without doing something.

**Most presidents try to keep up the appearance of "no deals," don't they?**

They like to keep up that appearance, but it's a very fine line to tread. Because if you say it too much, as I believe George Bush has, then it becomes more difficult, and more embarrassing, to make a deal when the time comes. In fact, Bush is in that position today, because all the ingredients for the release of the six hostages in Beirut are there.

**But he can't make a deal, because he's claimed so often that he won't deal with terrorists.**

It's just harder to make a deal. In fact, I think a deal is being cooked right now. But it won't be a serious problem, because the president will tell us that it's not a deal, and we'll be forgiving, because we want those people out.

**In your book you discuss the "Hitler argument" for assassination.**

Yes. The idea that if someone could have assassinated Hitler early on, World War II would have been avoided. You get tempted, when you're in a crisis, to think that that's an easy out. But it's not an easy out, for two reasons: On the one hand, it's really beneath our moral standards to play God, and decide who should live and who should not, when you're not at war. I would not like to be the government official empowered with making that decision. In point of fact, it would be the president's decision, which brings you to the second reason: If our president gets the blame, he'll also get the retribution, or at least he's going to be at risk. Also, when you go to assassinate a foreign leader, you generally have to hire a foreign gun to do it. It's very difficult to send an American in to kill a foreign leader of any prominence and hope to escape. So you have to hire somebody else, and that's dangerous, because you've lost control.

**You've asserted that both Carter and Reagan got too emotionally involved with the hostages.**

Yes, and that hurt both men. It made them each reach for solutions that were a little beyond their grasp. Now, I don't know how you get around this. We don't want stone-hearted presidents. But I think it's wise for future presidents to remember that you do have to step back from your emotions and try to make a reasoned response to terrorism.

**That must be very difficult when you're in contact with the distressed relatives.**

You're right. It's a very difficult situation for a president. And it's very difficult for us, the public. Because on the one hand, if we put too much pressure on the president, as was clearly the case with Jimmy Carter, it can backfire. But if we don't put any pressure at all, they can let it just slide. So

it's a delicate balance here, between the normal pressures of public opinion and pushing a president when there's really no suitable recourse.

**When has terrorism worked?**

I think, unfortunately, the Iranian hostage-taking, in 1979, worked from an Iranian point of view. First of all, they humiliated the United States for 444 days.

Secondly, internally, various Iranians used those hostages as pawns in their struggle to gain power in Iran. If anyone stood up and said, "Why don't we get rid of these hostages?" then that person was portrayed as being soft on the United States, which was the kiss of death.

**What can the United States learn from the way Israel deals with terrorists?**

The Israelis always use force against terrorists. And there are people in this country who think we should do the same thing, because that makes the terrorists think that they must always pay a price. But Israel is in a different situation than we are. It's a country at war,

**CONTINUED**

45.

3.

literally, with some of its neighbors, and figuratively with others. That doesn't apply to us. We're the moral leaders of the world, in my opinion, and for us to always retaliate, even when we might take innocent lives in the process, would undermine our stature in the world. And it's that stature that is going to attract other countries to cooperate with us and work against terrorism. That's the best solution overall: the use of legal recourses that don't

intrude into your values.

**When you took over at the CIA, were there any surprises?**

Well, I happened to arrive at the CIA just as a whole new generation of photographic satellites was put up. And it was astounding to me how much the technical people had been able to do.

**What kind of information did you get from the satellites?**

Once those satellites were up and running, there was no way any country was able to mass a sizable military force, in preparation for an attack, without our knowing it. But there were a lot of other uses. For instance, in the early 1970s, the Soviets knew they were going to have a bad grain harvest. Before they told anybody, they bought up all the grain from us that they could, at cheap prices. Then, as soon as their shortage became apparent, prices went up all over the world, and we lost a lot of money. Starting then, the CIA began predicting the Soviet grain harvest from satellite photographs. Pretty

soon we could do it better than the Soviets, because they were getting on-the-ground reports, and the on-the-ground people had a stake in it. If a farmer wasn't doing well, he'd try to minimize it. But we were monitoring the growth of the grain in the fields. I think, eventually, they began to count on us to tell them how their grain crop was doing. But the important thing was that we didn't get caught out on it anymore.

**Does this mean that the human spy is becoming obsolete?**

Not at all. But whereas in the past the human spy was the cutting edge of intelligence, the human spy today has become the rapier. He or she is the last thrust to get that piece of information you can't get any other way. But these days, you don't want to risk a spy's life, and your country's reputation, to give you something that a photograph or an electronic intercept will give you with very little risk at all. •

D. C. DENISON IS A CAMBRIDGE-BASED WRITER.

46.